

COMIC SHOP NEWS™

248



ARCHER & ARMSTRONG

Grade-A All the Way

Later this spring, Valiant Comics will firmly establish the structure of the Valiant Universe in its crossover series, *Unity*. Before *Unity* gets underway, however, Valiant will introduce a pair of characters who will play an important part in that series.

Archer and Armstrong is described by Valiant's Jon Hartz as "the best superhero 'buddy book' ever, with the humor of Eddie Murphy and Nick Nolte in *48 Hours* and the action-adventure you've come to expect from Valiant." Fans will get a chance to meet them in April in **Archer and Armstrong #0**, an origin issue that will lead into the *Unity* storyline.

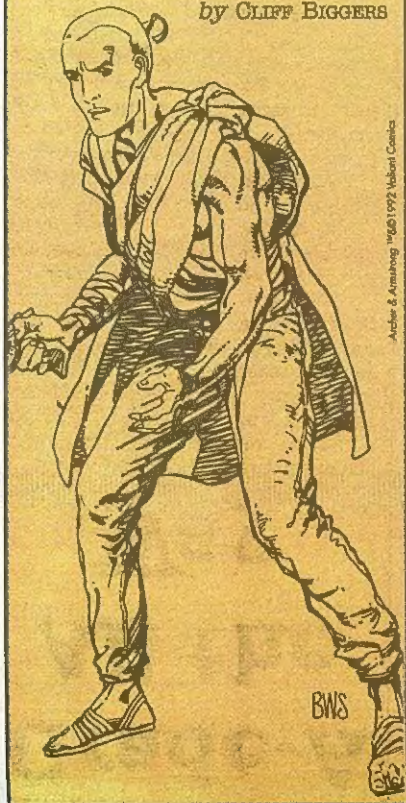
Armstrong is ten thousand years old, super-strong, and jaded. After all, he's seen pretty much everything in his ten millennia of existence, he's experienced pretty much every experience--what's left? For Armstrong, life is a daily quest for bar money on the streets of Los Angeles; the superhero life is just a part of his past.

Archer is only twenty years old--but he too has experienced the best and the worst that life has to offer. His parents were Bible Belt evangelists whose fanatical beliefs took their son to the edge of death. He escaped from them and ventured to the Far East, where he was taught the secrets of unleashing his incredible physical and psychic powers.

"Archer is being watched closely by a stranger, who after watching his fighting skills invites him to join the universal fight against an evil, dangerous man," Jon Hartz said. "The Anti-Christ--Armstrong... Archer is forced to make a life-threatening decision--and one that forms the genesis of Archer and Armstrong."

Archer & Armstrong is written by Valiant visionary Jim Shooter, who has brought together a series of diverse heroes, both new and revitalized, to form a viable third superhero comics line. Acclaimed artist Barry Windsor-Smith, who did the layouts for the first issue of *X-O Manowar* and the pencil art for the ten-part origin of Solar, is supplying the layouts for Archer & Armstrong, while Ralph Reese handles the finishes. **Archer & Armstrong #0**, an April release, is priced at \$2.50.

by CLIFF BIGGERS



Action Heats Up In Armageddon: Inferno

Waverider, the hero who traveled up and down the timestream in **Armageddon: 2001**, is hoping that time is on his side again in a new four-issue miniseries, **Armageddon: Inferno**. In this series written by John Ostrander, Waverider hopes to repair the damaged timestream (the damages came about because of the time-traveling exploits of the first two *Armageddon* series plus Superman's various time trips). In his travels, he runs into Abrax-



is and his twelve Daemon servants; when Waverider determines that he needs assistance to stop Abraxis before he wreaks total havoc on the timestream, he calls on some of DC's mightiest heroes from a variety of eras, including Batman, the Creeper, Jo Nah, Firestorm, the Spectre, Enemy Ace, Lobo, Starfire, Guy Gardner, Wonder Woman, Flash, Troia, Power Girl, Martian Manhunter, Hawkman, Sgt. Rock, Gunner & Sarge (and Pooch, of

course), and more.

Armageddon: Inferno also combines the talents of an all-star team of artists. The first issue is illustrated by Tom Mandrake, the second by Walt Simonson, the third by Art Adams, and the fourth by Tim Truman. Luke McDonnell illustrated framing sequences throughout the series.

Armageddon: Inferno, a standard-format miniseries priced at \$1 per issue is available now.

by ALEX KIRKLAND

McFarlane and Image Spawn a New Hero

Image Comics set sales records with the first issue of Rob Liefeld's new superhero title **Youngblood**. In May, they're ready to surpass their old records with the debut of Todd McFarlane's **Spawn**, a new hero in the Image Universe.

Spawn is an enigmatic superhero; at times he seems unbelievably powerful, while at other times he seems all too human. Unlike many superheroes who seem to use their powers constantly with no sign of exertion whatsoever, Spawn's superpowers take a toll on him with each use. "Every time he uses his power, he's one step closer to death," creator Todd McFarlane said. "He has a finite reserve of super-powers, which is tied to his life-force, so he's not always anxious to make use of his power."

Where did Spawn come from? McFarlane isn't telling--at least, not right away. "I want to reveal clues and hints about Spawn's background during the course of telling other stories. As a fan, I always found that more interesting than knowing everything about a character all at once. It certainly has worked for Wolverine," McFarlane said. "I can tell you that Spawn wasn't born or created from a need for revenge. In fact, just the opposite, Spawn came into being because of an overwhelming feeling of love. But Spawn is a tragic hero, as the love that created him is denied him due partly to trusting the wrong person."

Unlike *Youngblood*, Spawn seems to shy away from the spotlight, preferring to carry out his superhero role with a minimum of hype and publicity. He has kept his existence a virtual secret--but sooner or later, *Youngblood* will learn of Spawn, and no one knows whether they'll see him as an ally or an enemy. The

Youngblood link is a crucial part of Spawn's background. "Rob (Liefeld) and I have worked it out so that one of the *Youngblood* team members is a central character in the origin of Spawn. But we're not saying who or how or why just yet; we want to keep readers guessing."

Spawn #1, a May release from Image, will feature several bonuses. McFarlane and Ken Steacy have joined forces to create a centerspread poster of Spawn. "I'm a big fan of Ken and this seemed like the perfect opportunity to work together," McFarlane said. George Perez and Dale Keown will also supply pin-ups for the first issue.

Spawn #1 is priced at only \$1.95 because McFarlane wanted

to keep the price as low as possible. "Comics fans are usually on a pretty tight budget and they're used to buying my comics for less than \$2. With the current economic situation, I wanted to make sure that this new title would be affordable for them."

McFarlane doesn't regret his Spider-Man years, but he stresses that Spider-Man is a part of his past, while **Spawn** is his major project for the present. "To work on other projects for another company would be like competing with myself. This way, I focus on making **Spawn** the best comic I can. And if someone wants a comic by Todd McFarlane, they'll know exactly where to look."

by WAYNE LEE



Piecing Together the Treasures of Duckburg

Duckburg. It's a city of fowl animals--really. In fact, that's where you'll find some of the best known animals and comic characters in history. Scrooge McDuck, Donald Duck, and his three famous nephews--Huey, Dewey, and Louie--all live in this sprawling metropolis. Or perhaps it's a typical mid-western city...

Now's your chance to find out just what the city of Duckburg is really like, because Disney Comics is offering a special map of the city in their March, April, and May books. "You need to pick up all of the titles from those three months to get the full map." Disney representative Terri Sokol-Kachur said. "Each issue will feature a different section of the map--there are nine pieces altogether--which eventually fit together to show a complete map of Duckburg." The map was designed by artists Joe Pearson and Larry Mayer, and details the landmarks of the city. The different pieces to the map will be available in **Donald Duck** #s 25-27, **Walt Disney's Comics and Stories** #s 572-574, and **Uncle Scrooge** #s 267-269.

There is an added bonus to collecting the map. "There are questions that accompany each portion of the map, and everybody who answers the questions (which all pertain to the stories from these issues) will receive a special set of electrostatic stickers to go with his map", Sokol-Kachur said. The

sticker set will contain approximately twelve different residents of Duckburg.

But that's not the only bonus; all the entries will also take part in a special contest wherein three winners selected at random will receive original comic strip art from the **Donald Duck** newspaper comic strip of the 1970's. "The art was done by Talia Ferro," Sokol-Kachur said, "which should be a familiar name to all Duck fans; it's really pretty work." To be eligible for the August 10th drawing, all entries must be received by July 31, 1992.

The most special thing about this contest, though, is the opportunity to catch some prime Duck tales. There will be several classic stories reprinted, along with some special surprises. "We've found a never-before-seen Carl Barks one-page story that we will be printing in **Uncle Scrooge** #267," Sokol-Kachur said. "Not only that, but we are printing a Carl Barks story entitled 'Race to the South Seas' in **Donald Duck** #26 which was last seen in a special 1948 giveaway!" Also included will be classic tales from William VanHorn and newer material from modern great Don Rosa.

So, get your map together, look out for the Beagle Boys, and look for **CSN** on the streets of Duckburg--there has to be a comic shop somewhere!

by BRETT BROOKS

COMIC SHOP NEWS

A Comics Specialty Outlet

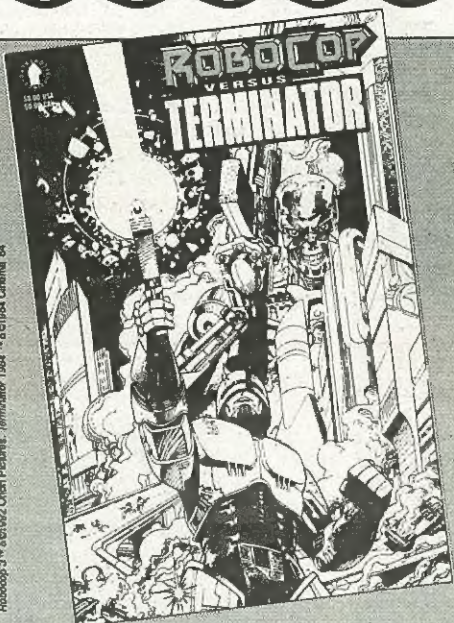
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A Pair of Metal Heads

RoboCop Vs. Terminator? Don't look surprised—CSN told you it was in the works! And now it's not only in the works, but on the Dark Horse schedule for late May release. And considering the creators that Dark Horse has tapped for this series, this is one title that fans won't dare miss...

Frank Miller, the acclaimed creator of **Batman: The Dark Knight Returns**, **Ronin**, **Sin City**, and **Elektra**, and the writer of **Give Me Liberty** and **Hard-Boiled**, is the author of this four-issue series; he is joined by acclaimed artist **Walt Simonson**, whose work on **Thor** and **Fantastic Four**, among other titles, has thrilled his legions of fans. The two are working together on this series that sends a trio of Terminators into the past to protect Alex Murphy, a.k.a. RoboCop, from an attack by a renegade rebel who gained access to Skynet's Time Displacement Equipment. Why does this rebel want Murphy dead? Why does Skynet want him alive? Only Miller and Simonson know for sure, and they aren't saying...



RoboCop Vs. Terminator #1, a 32-page full color comic priced at \$2.50, is scheduled for May 28th release.

Omaha Doubles In Size

Images of Omaha, the benefit book to help **Omaha the Cat Dancer** creator **Reed Waller** pay for expensive medical treatments, has elicited such an overwhelming response among comics professionals that the book has expanded in scope from a one-shot to a two-issue limited series. Each book will be 36 pages long in deluxe comic book format, and each is intended for adults only. According to Kitchen Sink, "Because **Images of Omaha** has been swiftly organized, the exact line-up of artists and writers in each book is not set at this time. However, cover art for both issues is nearing completion. **Rich Larson** and **Steve Fastner** are rendering the first cover in the same manner as their Hulk and Punisher posters for Marvel. The front cover to No. 2 is by **Cerebus** artists **Dave Sim** and **Gerhard**, and the back cover is by pin-up artist **Olivia**."



Contributors to the two issues include **Paul Chadwick**, **Dan Clowes**, **Howard Cruse**, **Will Eisner**, **Harlan Ellison**, **Phil Foglio**, **Neil Gaiman**, **Denis Kitchen**, **Alan Moore**, **Larry Marder**, **Frank Miller**, **Steve Rude**, **Mark Schultz**, **Al Williamson**, and others. **Images of Omaha #1** is slated for March release; the second issue follows in April—and this series gives comics fans a chance to enjoy quality material by some of the biggest names in the industry and to aid a very worthy cause at the same time!

Gotham City Gets Cavalier Treatment

Who is Gotham City's champion of justice when Batman is tied up with a very time-consuming case? None other than The Cavalier! What?... you've never heard of the Cavalier? Well, neither has Gotham City prior to **Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight #32**.

In "Blades," the three-part storyline beginning in this issue, Batman is obsessed with the case of Mister Lime, a killer whose victims are Gotham City's elderly; he devotes himself so single-mindedly to the case that he begins to neglect the remainder of Gotham's crime problem. That's where the Cavalier comes in; he appears, sword in hand, to stop crime in its tracks, and the media just loves this new, flashy hero.



"Blades" is written by **James Robinson**, the author of the Dark Horse series **Terminator: Secondary Objectives**. Robinson is joined by artist **Tim Sale**, whose stunning work most recently appeared in Dark Horse's **Billi 99** (previously, you saw his art on DC's **Challengers of the Unknown** limited series). **Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight #32**, a deluxe-format comic priced at \$1.75, is scheduled for April 30th release.

Caliber Goes for the Silverline

You may not recognize the name Silverline immediately, but you're more than likely to recognize some of the books the Silverline crew has produced: **Cat & mouse**, **Silverstorm**, and **The Mantus Files**. All of Silverline's work thus far has appeared under various Malibu Comics imprints, but beginning later this year, Silverline will be packaging a variety of books for Caliber Press.

"Our job as packager is to put the creative team as together and make sure the work is finished on time," **Roland Mann**, co-founder of Silverline, said. "We'll send the completed work in, and Caliber will handle the distribution and printing."

Gary Reed, Caliber publisher, said, "Silverline has established a good reputation for quality already. I'm excited to be working with them. They have access to talent that sometimes just gets overlooked."

The Silverline books will appear in conjunction with Caliber's new imprints, each of which will emphasize a particular type of graphic storytelling. "With Caliber starting its new imprints, this is a perfect time for us to begin a packaging relationship with them," **Steven Butler**, art director for Silverline, said. Silverline's first titles for Caliber include **The Scary Book** by **Sidney Williams**, **Steve Willhite**, and **Dan Schaefer**; **The Marauder** by **Sidney Williams** and **Jaxon Renick**; **Sirens** by **Sidney Williams** and **John Drury**; **Krey** by **Roland Mann**, **Steven Butler**, and **M.C. Wyman**; and a second **Silverstorm** miniseries written by **Mann**. The first title, **Scary Book**, is scheduled for May release; it's the story of a book of diabolical incantations lost somewhere on the earth, and the Devil's quest to recover it before Hell freezes over.

COMIC SHOP NEWS

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Here's the Holo Story

Spidey turns thirty this year, and his fans get the gifts! In this case, the gifts are a series of gold foil-embossed 4' x 5' holograms that will be featured on the thirtieth anniversary issues of all four ongoing Spider-Man titles beginning in April with **Spectacular Spider-Man #189**. In addition to a full-length Spider-Man adventure, this issue will also contain a new version of Spider-Man's origin as seen through Aunt May's eyes.

A month later, **Web of Spider-Man #90** offers its thirtieth anniversary special, a tale pitting Spider-Man against Mysterio. This issue will also include a retelling of Spider-Man's origin from the point of view of another member of Spidey's supporting cast.

Upcoming hologram-cover issues in this series include **Amazing Spider-Man #365** (scheduled for June release) and **Spider-Man #26** (available in July). In addition to the hologram, each book will also feature another bonus: a bound-in 3-page gatefold poster featuring all-new art.

Now That's Some Heavy-Duty Punishing...

Cage gave the Punisher an assist in his own title, so it's only natural that the Punisher would return the favor. In **Cage #4**, the Punisher joins Cage in an all-out effort to free Dakota North from the clutches of Tombstone, Nitro, Kickback, and Hardcore. The roots of this storyline began in the recently-released **Cage #2**—but the action reaches a white-hot level when the Punisher joins the team. **Cage #4** is written by **Marcus McLaurin** and illustrated by **Dwayne Turner & Chris Ivy**; look for it on May 5th.

Hot Wheels

Speed Racer, animated star of television and videotape, returns to the comic shop racks in May in a special three-issue miniseries from Now Comics. **Speed Racer** is described by Now as "Speed like you've never seen him before—Speed Racer for the '90s!" In this series, Pops approaches GM with plans for the state-of-the-art Mach VI—but it seems that there are other, more shady, characters who are very interested in building their own Mach VI...

The new series, written by **Tony Caputo** and illustrated by **Joe Kozlowski** and **Mark Stegbauer**, will be released in three different editions: The standard comic-shop edition, which features a special cardstock cover with a Mach V cut-out, is priced at \$2.50. There's also a newsstand edition (which will also be available through comic shops) with a standard cover featuring different art; it will be polybagged with a free button for only \$1.95. As a bonus, the creators are signing 500 copies of this newsstand edition that will be inserted randomly into the shipping. Finally, a prestige-format \$4.95 edition will feature sixteen additional pages that include a cover gallery featuring all the past Speed Racer and Racer-X covers plus the technical information on the Mach V. The prestige edition will also be polybagged with a special Speed Racer button. Five hundred randomly-inserted copies of this prestige-format edition will also be signed and numbered by the creators prior to shipping.



While the new mini-series features concepts and characters from the original **Speed Racer** animated series (including Racer-X!), Now does warn that "this miniseries contains more violence and language than previous **Speed Racer** issues."

At the same time the new **Speed Racer** series debuts, Now will also release **Speed Racer Volume XIII**, a two-episode videotape featuring "The Fierce Racer" parts one and two (guest-starring Racer-X). **Speed Racer Volume XIII**, available in VHS format only, is priced at \$19.95.

All the News That Fits, We Print!

The survey results are in, and it isn't even close. With over 400 ballots cast, almost 94% of CSN's voting readers have chosen to bid adieu to the Turtles in exchange for more news and information. "The Turtles comic is aimed at comics fans, but the newspaper strip is done for kids," one voter commented. "I want to know what's happening in comics," another voter said, "not what's happening in the Turtles strip."



The final results are as follows: 423 readers mailed in a ballot, and of those, only 62 said they read the strip regularly--and of those 62, 19 of them saw it elsewhere. 396 readers voted to replace the strip with expanded news, reviews, interviews, etc.; only 27 readers asked that we continue to run the strip. Several readers asked that we run the checklist at least one more time a month, which we'll try to do. Of course, if your local newspaper doesn't carry the **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** strip, you can still get it in monthly installments through **Comics Revue**, the premiere collection of adventure comic strips.

Arion's Making Waves Again



Arion the Immortal, a new six-issue series debuting this spring, brings a little magic back to Arion's life again--but oddly enough, the former Lord of Atlantis isn't particularly sure that he wants the magic to return!

Arion's former role as Lord of the magical realm of Atlantis has given way to his current life as a three-card monte hustler and chess sharp scamming a living from tourists in New York City. He lives in a tiny room on the 13th floor of the Carney Hall Building, surrounded by memorabilia from happier bygone days, enjoying the company of Amanda, for whom he is a mentor. His former enemy the Lord of Chaos is also adapting to his new life as a deli owner; Arion finds small pleasures in short-changing him every chance he gets. Doesn't sound like a life of excitement for a former master of the mystical, does it? Maybe not, but Arion is happy--at least, he's happy until the magic returns. But if Arion's magic is back, then what about his evil brother Garn...and the Lord of Chaos?... A nice quiet life falls by the wayside as Arion must once again become a hero, but this time it's the island realm of Manhattan he must defend.

Arion the Immortal is written by Arion co-creator Paul Kupperberg and illustrated by Ron Wilson and Jerry Acerno; Randy DuBurke supplies the covers for all six issues. **Arion the Immortal #1**, a \$1.50 comic, debuts on May 28th.

Introducing a Cool New Villain

Frost is a new villain slated to debut in the Marvel Universe in May--but you can't help but feel a little sorry for him, since in his first time out as a super-villain, he has to face both the Hulk and the Punisher!

Incredible Hulk #395 brings back the Hulk's Mr. Fixit identity; the Hulk is out to avenge the murder of his former boss, and that's how he meets Frost. He also meets the Punisher, giving this issue just the right mix of malevolence, muscles, and munitions to guarantee a memorable confrontation. **Incredible Hulk #395** is written by Peter David and illustrated by Dale Keown and Mark Farmer; look for it on May 21st.

Byrning Up the Space Lanes

With a variety of new titles and one-shots focusing the spotlight on Green Lantern, DC has decided this is the perfect season to release a **Green Lantern T-Shirt** featuring art by fan-favorite John Byrne. This shirt, which features the true Green Lantern Hal Jordan (gee, we're not showing any editorial bias, are we?...) in cosmic action, will feature full-color art on a black all-cotton shirt priced at \$14.95. As with all specialty items of this sort, be sure to reserve your shirt with your local comic shop--and tell 'em that CSN sent you, okay?...

Darkwing Duck Flies Again!

The four-part **Darkwing Duck** miniseries proved to be one of the most difficult Disney books to find; the issues seemed to sell out almost everywhere as soon as they were published. So that fans won't have to miss out on this series, Disney is collecting the entire 92-page saga into a single budget-priced **Colossal Comics Collection**. The story is written by Tad Stones, Jymn Magon, and Jan Strnad and illustrated by John Blair Moore, George Wildman, and Gary Martin. Look for it all in **Colossal Comics Collection #4**, a May release from Disney--and it'll only set you back \$1.95 for the entire four-issue storyline, which is only 1/3 the cost of the original series!

CRUSADERS #1
Explosive Impact Team-Up!

THE COMING OF THE CRUSADERS
Beginning with Legend of the Shield #10

IMPACT WHO'S WHO #3!

Cool COLLECTIBLE TRADING CARDS
18 cards--ONLY in these books!

ACTION-PACKED ANNUALS

IMPACT COMICS

NOW BETTER THAN EVER!



Spectacular wrap around cover!

RALPH SNART ADVENTURES #1 Part One of Three

Written by Marc Hansen
Art by Marc Hansen

He's back again, and there's nothing you can do about it! This Collectors' Edition will be released with four collectors' trading cards that will never be available anywhere else! The Direct Market version will be non-Code approved with a special wrap-around cover. You will be able to order specific quantities of each card edition. Each issue #1 will ship weekly throughout the month of March.

PLUS: The Direct Market version will have the never-before-published Ralph Snart (no holds barred) Comics Code satire!

Full Color Monthly Mini-Series
\$2.50 US/\$2.95 Canada



CARD #1

- ☐ RALPH SNART ADVENTURES Vol. 4, No. 1 Trading Card #1--Ships March 6, 1992
- ☐ RALPH SNART ADVENTURES Vol. 4, No. 1 Trading Card #2--Ships March 13, 1992
- ☐ RALPH SNART ADVENTURES Vol. 4, No. 1 Trading Card #3--Ships March 20, 1992
- ☐ RALPH SNART ADVENTURES Vol. 4, No. 1 Trading Card #4--Ships March 27, 1992
- ☐ RALPH SNART ADVENTURES Vol. 4, No. 1 Trading Card #

ON SALE NOW!

NOW COMICS

CSN CHARTS

TOP 50 COMICS

CSN's Top Seller charts are based on figures supplied by the two major distributors, Diamond Distribution and Capital City Distribution, as well as figures by a cross-section of comics specialty shops. The distributor's figures represent retailer orders placed on the titles, while the information from stores represents copies sold.

1. X-Men 7
2. Uncanny X-Men 287
3. X-Men Annual 1
4. Spider-Man 21
5. Cage 1
6. Punisher War Zone 2
7. Amazing Spider-Man 361
8. Wolverine 53
9. Marvel Comics Presents 100
10. X-Factor 77
11. Warlock and the Infinity Watch 3
12. Justice League Spectacular 1
13. Ghost Rider 24
14. Deathlok 10
15. Punisher 62
16. New Warriors 22
17. Marvel Comics Presents 99
18. Incredible Hulk 392
19. Aliens: Hive 1
20. Batman: Gotham Nights 2
21. Silver Surfer 64
22. Star Wars: Dark Empire 2
23. Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight 29
24. Darkhawk 14
25. Punisher Armory 3
26. Next Men 0
27. Batman 476
28. Excalibur 49
29. Predator: Bloody Sands of Time 2
30. Thor 446
31. Armageddon Inferno 1
32. Captain America 399
33. Punisher War Journal 41
34. Avengers 346
35. Web of Spider-Man 87
36. Iron Man 279
37. Guardians of the Galaxy 23
38. Spectacular Spider-Man 187
39. Detective Comics 643
40. Sleepwalker 11
41. Fantastic Four 363
42. Avengers West Coast 81
43. Namor the Sub-Mariner 25
44. Daredevil 303
45. Terminator: Enemy Within 4
46. Wonder Man 8
47. Deathstroke the Terminator 9
48. Alpha Flight 107
49. Quasar 37
50. Green Lantern 23

TOP DOLLAR COMICS

The following comics, graphic novels and trade paperbacks were given Top Dollar ratings based on the dollar volume of the copies sold (or are expected to sell) during the late February and March sales period.

1. X-Men Annual 1
2. X-Men 7
3. Uncanny X-Men 287
4. Spider-Man 21
5. Cage 1
6. Punisher War Zone 2
7. Wolverine 53
8. Warlock & the Infinity Watch 3
9. Marvel Comics Presents 100
10. Ghost Rider 24
11. Aliens: Hive 1
12. Star Wars: Dark Empire 2
13. Amazing Spider-Man 361
14. Punisher: G-Force
15. Justice League Spectacular 1
16. X-Factor 77
17. Deathlok 10
18. Next Men 0
19. Marvel Comics Presents 99
20. Predator: Bloody Sands of Time
21. Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight 29
22. Punisher Armory 3
23. Excalibur 49
24. Punisher War Journal 41
25. Terminator: Enemy Within 4
26. Punisher 62
27. New Warriors 22
28. Incredible Hulk 392
29. Deathstroke the Terminator 9
30. Alpha Flight 107
31. Young Indiana Jones Chronicles 1
32. Batman: Gotham Nights 2
33. Silver Surfer 64
34. Darkhawk 14
35. Death's Head II 2
36. Thor 446
37. Moon Knight 37
38. Griffin 5
39. Captain America 399
40. Batman 476
41. Avengers 346
42. Web of Spider-Man 87
43. Armageddon Inferno 1
44. The 'Nam 67
45. Iron Man 279
46. New Titans 85
47. Guardians of the Galaxy 23
48. Spectacular Spider-Man 187
49. Magnus Robot Fighter 12
50. Sleepwalker 11

TOP 10 BLACK & WHITE COMICS

1. Dark Horse Presents 59
2. Elfquest 9
3. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 43
4. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 44
5. Savage Sword of Conan 195
6. Cerebus 155
7. Oz Squad 2
8. Omaha the Cat Dancer 17
9. Evil Ernie 3
10. Venus Wars 11

TOP TEN NON-COMICS

The Top Ten Non-Comics is based on number and not dollar value. This category includes graphic novels, hardcovers, trade paperbacks, portfolios, etc. It includes books that actually were on sale during the March sales period.

1. DC Universe Trading Cards (Impel)
2. Calvin & Hobbes: Attack...Snow Goons
3. Many Deaths of the Batman TPB
4. Marvel Universe Handbook 17
5. Spider-Man: Fear Itself GN
6. Carl Barks Library Album 1
7. Justice League International: Secret Gospel of Maxwell Lord TPB
8. Comics Values Monthly 64
9. Justice League Archives Volume 1
10. Guardians of the Galaxy: Quest...

Give & Take
by Cliff Biggers
& Brett Brooks

Each month, Cliff Biggers (in plain type) and Brett Brooks (in italic type) take a look at a few choice comics scheduled for release within the next month. Publishers interested in having their books considered for review should send copies to CSN Give and Take, 2339 Milstead Circle, Marietta GA 30066. We'd prefer receiving copies of the books at least thirty days before they're supposed to reach comic shops. Enough business; now let's talk comics!

A pundit once speculated that the half-life of a comics fan is about five years—that is, about half of the comics fan who begin collecting will drop out in about five years. If you accept this as truth, then at any given time, about half of the comics fans have little first-hand knowledge of anything more than five years old.

That's a very sobering thought. Based on the five-year half-life, half the readers of today's comics have no first-hand knowledge of the Barry Allen Flash other than what they saw on last year's short-lived CBS television show (or the few Barry Allen Flash tales it inspired). For those of us who have been around for a while, Barry Allen is the Flash, no matter how often Wally West—or DC—tries to make us forget it.

Fans who know Barry Allen only as some distant memory to which Wally West refers from time to time are about to get an education beginning with *Flash: Year One* #62. This is the first part of a four-part Flash: Year One storyline from new writer Mark Waid, and it shows an abiding appreciation for Barry Allen's Flash that rivals my own.

By today's standards, the origin of the Kid Flash (today's Flash) was simply too pat, too coincidental. The Flash is explaining how a freak lightning bolt and a chemical accident resulted in his gaining superspeed powers when, amazingly enough, the exact same accident occurs once again and Wally West gains the same powers. No matter how DC tried to subsequently explain these dual phenomena in later tales, they remain just too coincidental. Recognizing that any explanation would simply be rationalization, Waid doesn't attempt to explain—he simply recreates. "Sorry, Wally!" the Barry Allen Flash tells his young admirer. "What happened that day was a billion-to-one chance! You know what they say... Lightning never strikes twice in the same place!" Think again, Barry...

Since Wally West dropped the "Kid" from his name and became the new Flash, he has lived in the shadow of Barry Allen—both in the eyes of the superhero residents of the DC Universe, who remember the Barry Allen Flash with fondness, and in the eyes of fans like me, who think of Barry Allen as the real Flash. Waid's story not only shows fans how Wally West deals with life in the shadow of Barry Allen, but it also reminds those fans who have come into the hobby in the past half-decade of just who Barry Allen was.

If you take the half-life theory to heart, that would also imply that half of the people who are reading comics after their first five years won't be in ten, and the number decreases geometrically for every five years; what that means is that without something like *Flash: Year One*, their will be only one-quarter the number of fans who read the flash when Barry was still the star. Now, I'm of the same thinking that your are—Barry Allen was and always will be the real Flash—but it's time to face up to the fact that Wally West is the Flash now—Barry's dead. *Flash: Year One* lets readers see the background, and not just the origin, of the Flash; what it was that not only made Wally West have super-speed, but the man that made Wally West into a hero.

I agree with you in part—but at the same time, if there are so many collectors who still have a fondness for the Barry Allen Flash, then maybe it's time to reincarnate Barry Allen in some form—even if it's just a series of "classic Flash" stories *a la Legends of the Dark Knight*.

Let's try to put Wally West's situation in perspective for those of you who don't normally read the Flash. Imagine, if you will, that it was Batman, not the Jason Todd Robin, who was killed by the Joker. How would Jason Todd have responded? Perhaps he would have, in time, graduated from that silly red, yellow, and green suit into the familiar midnight-and-grey Batman costume, honoring the memory of the man who trained him. That's the situation in which Wally West finds himself now.

Waid's story is a real memory trip, both for old-time readers and for Wally West himself, who is in-





spired to remember his early days by the discovery of some of Iris West Allen's scrapbooks. We see the origin of the Kid Flash once again—but this time, we see it through ten-year-old Wally West's eyes.

Greg LaRocque and José Marzan have developed into a pretty good Flash art team—and believe me, that's saying something, because the Flash is not an easy hero to illustrate. So many artists are capable of drawing overly-muscled figures who can stand around and look ominous; capturing the deftness of the human form in motion is much more difficult, and some very capable artists have proven totally inadequate at illustrating either Flash. Many artists portray a Flash who looks like he's falling over rather than running; LaRocque's Flash moves, and that's quite important when your hero's ability is rapid motion.

Strangely enough, I was thinking about the art problems of the Flash very recently, and I came to a similar conclusion: the Flash is one of the most difficult heroes to draw simply because of the way he moves. Speed is hard to convey in a medium where every action is a still frame moment. Every artist who has conveyed the Flash effectively has done so by using something of a unique style, and Greg LaRocque has finally found his niche. He can make the Flash look like he is moving, and not just ready to move.

Flash: Year One is important enough in Flash continuity that DC is promoting the title to biweekly status for this four-part storyline. It's also entertaining enough that fans should give Mark Waid's Flash story a try; it's a great way to get to know two Flashes.

It snuck up on the public and took them by surprise. No one expected it to have such bite, and yet it managed to sink its teeth into a very large following of readers. I'm talking about from the Darkness, and to use a little girl's line, it's baaack...

Actually, I should probably say that she's back, because the story is still centering around the life (or should that be unlifed?) of Desnoirs, the sultry Vampire. From the Darkness Book Two: Blood Vows picks up where the first miniseries ended. Desnoirs' death at the hands of Ray Thorn has been something of an upsetting experience to her, and she wants to see him suffer for it. There is more than just a story of revenge at work

here though. Ray has been thrown in jail for his brother's murder, and is suspected of insanity—and from all indications, he might be...

Ed Polgardy's script is just as strong here as it was in the initial series. I enjoyed Dark Horse's Vampirella series for what it was, but Vampirella is a mere shadow of a vampire in comparison with Polgardy's portrayal of Desnoirs. In fact, not even the recent Tomb of Dracula miniseries portrayed a vampire as being such a powerful force of evil as Polgardy portrays Desnoirs here.

The art on Blood Vows is easily as strong as the first mini-series. Jim Balent has produced a very tight, strongly rendered work. Nothing seems silly or extreme, and he doesn't seem to be forcing any of the vampire effects. In fact, he seems to play them down somewhat to help add to the tension of the story.

There's a great deal of nudity in Blood Vows, but it's a logical part of the comic book—and Balent illustrates the human form quite well (and the undead form as well, for that matter).

Form the Darkness Book Two: Blood Vows is an overall stronger work than its predecessor. The story and motivations of all the characters seem much more concrete than the first time. There is still a strong sense of danger, and just a slight sense of paranoia that creeps over the reader, but isn't that what a horror comic is supposed to do?

Comics fans always seem to enjoy in-jokes—so they're sure to get a few chuckles from Jughead #34. Terry Collins' lead story for this issue is a dream-tale that takes Jughead into a strange world that's an amalgam of the Marvel Universe and L. Frank Baum's Oz. Fans of either Marvel or Oz will have fun with the story; fans of both, however, will particularly enjoy the way Collins weaves the two milieus together into a single surreal world. Collins also manages to poke fun at current comics marketing gimmicks (or, to use what one savvy—and caustically witty—industry insider says is sure to be the new preferred term, "sales enhancements") and mutant-mania.

It makes you wonder if the cover to this issue of Jughead is going to have a special honey-basted-super-gloss-fluoridated cover. The thing about this issue to me was that it went by too quickly. I read it three times just

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because I was having too much fun to see it end. I mean, heck, we didn't even get to see Jughead use those utensils that sprang out from the back of his wrist!

Editor Daryl Edelman is trying to get fans to take a look at Jughead once again, what with his new tendency towards continuity, modern characters, and overt comics references like the recent *Avengers* #4-inspired cover. *Jughead* #34 is an entertaining stand-alone story that affords readers a chance to see just how different Jughead is nowadays compared to the Archie supporting character they might remember.

There are certain characters that always inspire people to do their best work—and out of all of those characters perhaps the most inspiring is Batman. Batman is more than just a comics character; he is, in many ways, the comics character. He is the side of every person that craves retribution and justice. He is the figure that looms in the shadows, ready to come to your aid. He is the primal force that tells you that there is something out there in the night that is calming and soothing, and at the same time frightening and harsh. He is what every man wants to be—strong, wise, and just. So why should anyone be surprised when a creator surpasses their previous efforts with their work on Batman? I don't know, but it still surprises me...

Beginning in *Detective* #644, the new creative team of Chuck Dixon, Tom Lyle, and Scott Hanna take over the reigns. This is the same team that produced two big hit *Robin* mini-series, so you are probably already familiar with their work. Well, forget all of that, because the work that they've done on *Detective* far and away surpasses anything that they have produced before.

The story involves a killer who found that the electric chair isn't quite the death experience that it was supposed to have been, but rather the source of fantastic electrical powers with which he can exact his revenge. Unfortunately, someone already uses that MO, and the Electrocuter is ticked off about it—and Batman's caught in the middle.

But it wasn't the story that made this book great—not really. I mean, the story was very good, but it was the attention to details that made the book work so well. The little asides between Batman and Robin, between Robin and Alfred, between Batman and Commissioner Gordon brought out more character than a thousand brooding looks. On top of that, it felt as though the story wasn't just beginning—and that, at the same time, it was nowhere near the end. These characters had depth beyond the page; there were things that were occurring in their lives off panel—they weren't just cardboard cutouts running around in a cardboard story.

Prior to Chuck Dixon's work on this series, I was firmly convinced that the only writer in the past decade who had turned out a decent Batman and Robin story was Mike W. Barr. Now Mike has company in that regard. Writing Batman and Robin is, in many ways, far more difficult than just writing Batman. It's very easy to capture that noir feel of a Batman story, to make use of that brooding, oppressive, style and that Byronic-hero approach. When you counterbalance that with a young sidekick, though, you have to interpret Batman differently; he is not only a figure of vengeance, but he is also a figure of justice and mercy. Dixon is able to bring that interpretation of Batman to the comics page quite well.

Did you ever see *To Kill A Mockingbird*? There's a scene in there in which one man shows his disgust with the protagonist, Atticus Finch, by spitting in his face. For a brief moment, Atticus clenches his fist and it's apparent that he's ready to fight back. Then he becomes aware that his young son, Jem, is watching him, and his attitude changes. That's the sort of effect that Robin has on Batman; he's a tempering force, and I think that's why many writers prefer to leave Robin out of the picture. While a Batman story is more forceful than a Batman and Robin story, I think fans can really enjoy both. I hope *Detective Comics* will remain the Batman and Robin comic rather than becoming just another Bat-



Cybersuit Arkadyne



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Artistically, this is the finest that *Detective* has looked since Alan Davis left the book. Tom Lyle has a style that is somewhat reminiscent of a dozen artists, but it always stays fresh with him. I suppose the closest analogy that can be made is to either John Byrne or Neil Adams, but he's not overtly working in either style. Lyle has created a look that is strictly his own. Inker Scott Hanna emphasizes that look with a sense of mood that isn't simply spattered out of an ink well. Hanna seems to understand how to add black without removing detail.

I am always amazed to see someone come onto a book like *Detective* (which I had already been reading and enjoying thoroughly) and make my jaw go slack. There is something to this work—an inspiration—and that inspiration on the creator's part carries over to the reader, and inspires someone else.

Remember all those great underwater sfx extravaganzas from a few years ago? *Leviathan*, *The Abyss*, *Deepstar Six*, *Idol*... What's that? You don't remember that last one?...

Well, there's a reason: *Idol* isn't an underwater sfx extravaganza—it's a comic book about an underwater sfx extravaganza. Like *The Stunt Man*, it takes readers behind the scenes in the production of a film—in this case, an underwater sf-monster film being filmed on an abandoned US biological warfare experimentation site (bringing back shadow memories of James Cameron's *Abyss* experiences at the abandoned site of what was to have been a nuclear-power-plant). It's the story of a big-name female lead who finds herself enticed/forced into doing a sequel to a monster film that helped break her career (can you say Sigourney Weaver?...), a special effects crew giving readers behind-the-scenes looks at the effects industry (remember *F/X* and *F/X2*?—in other words, writers Gerard Jones and Steve Mattsson have managed to create a superb industry-insider adventure story that would have made a far better film than half the movies to which it makes oblique reference.

You're taking all of the fun out of this for me! I was hoping to make some of those little asides that you've hogged-up in your first paragraph.

A comic book about the making of a special effects film sounds dull—but that's not all that *Idol* is. You see, while the government has abandoned its biological warfare experimentation, the scientist who headed the project isn't ready to throw in the towel. Introduce a full film-production crew and cast into such an environment and you can be sure that problems will develop...deadly problems...

There's another subplot that begins to unfold in the first issue as well: the Russians didn't trust the Americans to give up their biological warfare experimentation, so they have planted an agent in the film crew. Of course, *Idol* was created before changes in Russia made the idea of Russian spies seem almost as antiquated as Nazi villains—but then, comics haven't given up on those either, have they?...

One of the things that made *Idol* particularly entertaining to me was the character of Rachel Ahmed. Rachel is presented as a true hero; she has overcome several setbacks to try and make something work, and what's more, she hasn't stepped on people to get there. Rachel is a character who seems selfless, honest, and concerned about the well-being of those around her. Of course, this is just the first issue, and we still don't know who is responsible for all of the trouble on the station...

Gerard Jones seems to have found a niche for himself as the comics industry's film expert; *The Trouble With Girls*, *Wonder Man*, and now *Idol* have all given fans a behind-the-scenes look at the motion picture industry. To Jones' credit, he always makes it entertaining—but here, he and Mattsson have created such a suspenseful story that the industry-insider storyline seems almost secondary.

Ron Randall's art has never looked better than it does here; he's always been a capable illustrator, but here he is a superb visual storyteller as well, which makes him a perfect artist for a tale about the film industry. Rick Magyar's inks complement Randall's pencils quite well, particularly on the shadowy sequences and the underwater action.

I've always been a fan of Ron Randall's art, but I still agree that this is the best that it has looked. Of course, I feel that Rick Magyar is one of the best inkers in the business, so I shouldn't be surprised. Randall has always seemed to have a wonderful flare to make things seem real; I don't mean realistic, I mean real. The guns that Mercy St. Clair carried in *Trekker* never looked realistic, but I never had problems believing they could be guns. If he had any weakness before, it was that his art was too clean, and Magyar's inks soften his work up without making it lose its clarity. Some of the finest work I've seen in some time.

Idol is a book that has to overcome several handicaps: it's not about superheroes, there are no mu-

tants, and neither the Punisher, Ghost Rider, nor Wolverine guest star in it. Nevertheless, it's one of Marvel's most entertaining titles of the month; if it were a film, you'd be raving about it to your friends.

On first glance, *Cybersuit Arkadyne* seems like your typical giant robot fights an intergalactic war comic. Get over it—it isn't. Creator Tim Eldred has teamed with scripter Jon Jarrard to create a story of past friendship that refuses to die, and of uncertain future for both a small group of people and the planet Earth. *Cybersuit Arkadyne* is a new defense system designed by the government of Earth to ward off aliens who are slowly working their way into the solar system—despite the government's public denial of such an occurrence. The

pilot of this new experimental suit is a young man who got into the position to try and live up to his best friends' hopes—a friend who died in another of the experimental suits—or did he?...

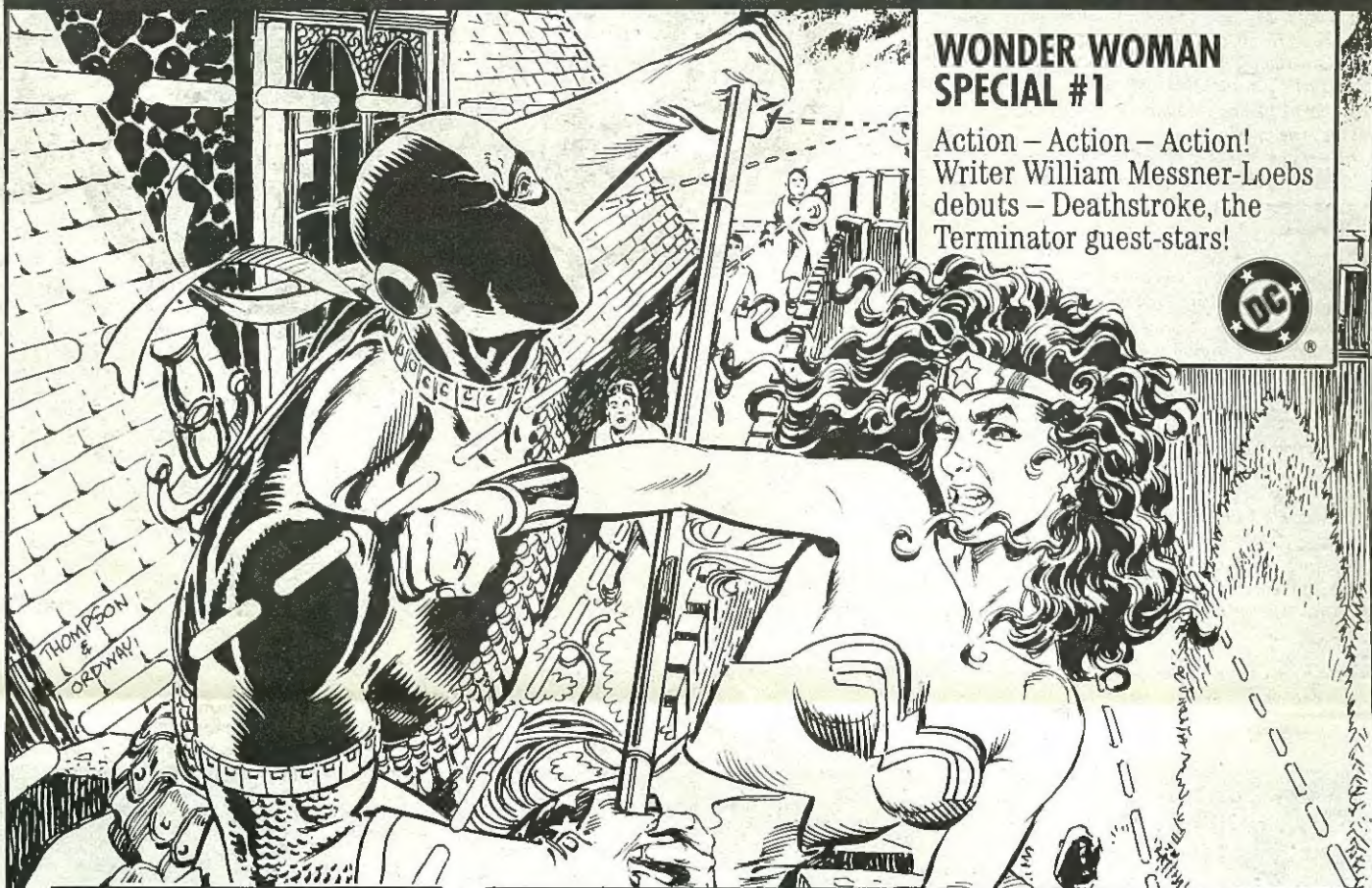
The storyline is, at times, reminiscent of Joe Haldeman's and Marvano's *Forever War* in that the portrayal of the impending war is very human. Most books about cybersuits and mecha and the like focus on the high-tech equipment, making the humans little more than optional control packs that plug into all that metal and chrome weaponry. Here, the emphasis is on people, both their good and their bad aspects. It's a very human story, and that's far more entertaining than a high-tech mecha slugfest or a humans-versus-aliens conflict painted

with an overly broad brush.

I'm normally very bored by robot-and-cybersuit stories. I enjoyed *Cybersuit Arkadyne*. That, in itself, says a lot about what kind of story this is.

The art on *Cybersuit Arkadyne* is appropriately manga-influenced. Tim Eldred is well known for his manga style art, and it works extremely well on this series. The story combines mystery, action, espionage, and human relations in an entertaining balance. Overall, *Cybersuit Arkadyne* provides more than it appears on the surface. If you're a fan of Japanese manga and pick it up for that reason, you won't be disappointed, but if you are just a fan who enjoys a well crafted story with solid art, then you won't find *Cybersuit Arkadyne* a poor choice, either.

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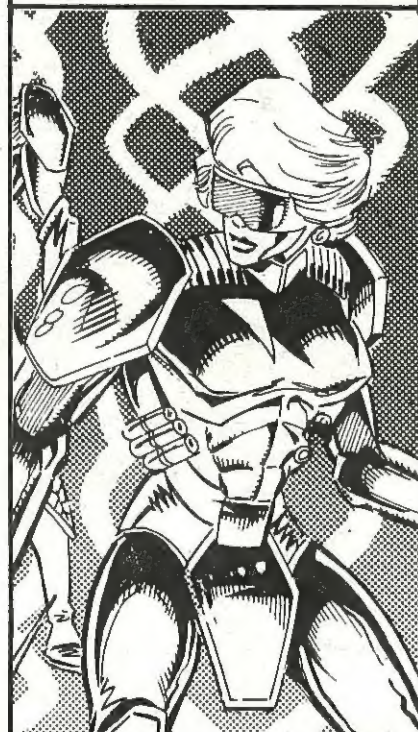
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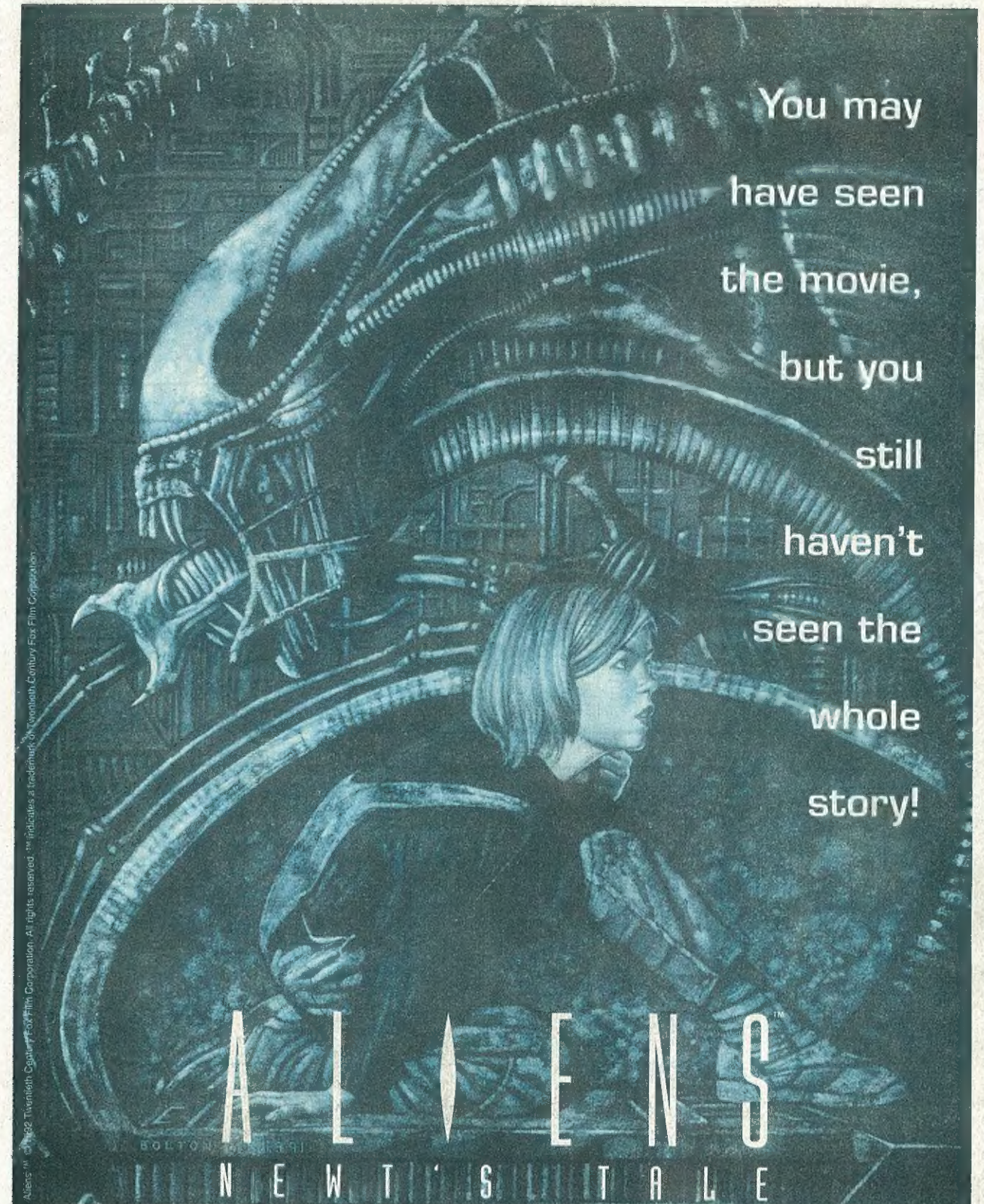
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